SONGS of a WANDERER

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RASKIN

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SONGS OF A WANDERER

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BY

PHILIP M. RASKIN

PHILADELPHIA
THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA
1917

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To

LOUIS D. BRANDEIS

As a mark of admiration and respect

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The Autumn Rain

DRIPPING, drizzling autumn rain,
Beating on my window-pane,
From my window on the ground—
How monotonous a sound!
Drip-drip-drip and drop-drop-drop,
Long, long hours without a stop;
Dripping, drizzling, beating fast,
Telling stories of my past,
Bringing memories again,
Cold and dismal as the rain,
Cold and dismal as the truth
Of my childhood, of my youth,
That arrived and passed away
Like a drizzling autumn day.
Drip-drip-drip and drop-drop-drop,
All day long without a stop!

Drizzle, drip, and tell me more—
What my future has in store.
Tell, I pray you, like a friend,
Will my autumn ever end?
What! foretell you exile, pain!
Nothing new, O foolish rain!
Exile is my people's nurse,
From our cradle to our hearse.
Drip-drip-drip and drop-drop-drop,
All day long without a stop.
Can you tell no other thing?
Better stop, so I may sing,
Sing the life-song of a Jew—
I can sadlier sing than you.

The Jewish Child

HE is a child, and yet he is
Much older than his years;
He laughs, but in his laugh is oft
More sadness than in tears.

He frisks and sports, but 'mid his pranks
He stares; and in his face
You read, as in an open book,
The drama of his race.

And in his deep, dark, sparkling eyes
You see his people's doom:
They mirror both bright eastern skies
And northern mist and gloom.

He plays, he capers like a child,
But oft it seems to you
That in a moment he will grow
An old, a wandering Jew.

He frolics, but his very glee
With pathos is entwined;
He's child and man, he's young and old,
He's joy and gloom combined.

By Song

SHE stood before me gay and youthful,
With radiant face and pleading eyes:
"O sing me, friend, a song of freedom,
Of love, and youth, and cloudless skies."

O child, I'd sing of love and freedom,
But know not how that song to start:
The world—my stepmother—in childhood
Of childhood's joy deprived my heart.

Not with a song my mother cradled
And lulled her darling boy to sleep:
The mothers of my hapless people,
They seldom sing and often weep.

I craved for freedom in my childhood:
The field in spring was sweet and good;
But Jewish boys must learn the Torah,
And caper not in field or wood.

My youthless youth passed in the ghetto,
Where joy and mirth are sought in vain;
I wandered through the world a stranger,
A friendless and a homeless Cain.

O ask not for a song of freedom,
A song that gladdens and that cheers:
The world—my stepmother—has taught me
One only song, the song of tears.

My Birthplace

NOT in frolic, joy, and freedom,
Is, O friend, my childhood gone;
In the place my mother bore me
Sun of freedom never shone.

There, my friend, where every life-beam
Is in clouds of death concealed,
Where Cain's curse: "Forever wander,"
On each human brow is sealed.

Where men come and go like shadows,
Pray, and fast, and toil, and slave,
Life on earth devoutly crushing
For a dream beyond the grave.

Where, of earthly life despairing,
Men in vain to heaven look;
Where man's heart and soul are buried
In the pages of a book.

Where man's thought forever hovers
In a lifeless space of gloom;
Where the brightest youth is youthless,
Fairest plants fade ere they bloom.

In the ghetto, friend, the ghetto,
Where all hopes at birth decay,
There my mother bore and nursed me,
There my childhood passed away.

A Ghetto Melody

(After the Yiddish)

IF only the trees could have learnèd my language,
To them I would tell my sad tale;
And willow, and chestnut, and oak in the forest
My fate would bewail.

If only the blades with my speech were acquainted,
To them I my pain would reveal:
The pain of an errant, the pain of a vagrant,
That no one can heal.

If only the roses my tongue could have mastered,
My tears they would drink 'stead of dew:
The tears of a child of the fields and the flowers
With grief of a Jew.

For I, a descendant of that ancient people
Who gods to the world has supplied,
Alas, had no God left to me who could listen,
When pining I cried.

If only the roses, the blades, and the breezes
Could feel the sad note of my song,
The rose would be trembling, the breeze would be moaning,
Like me all day long!

Disillusion

I, TOO, have built enchanted towers
And phantom castles in the air,
I, too, have dreamt of fragrant flowers
That ever sweet remain and fair.

I, too, believed in treasures hidden—
In love and youth that never fade;
But in the flowered groves of Eden
How short a time, O friend, I stayed!

Long ere I climbed youth's magic steeple,
I knew life's sorrows, tears, and pains;
I saw a great and ancient people —
That freed the world—in servile chains.

I saw it racked, and cursed, and banished
For teaching mankind love and truth,
And one by one my sweet dreams vanished
Together with my youthless youth.

And in the sound of fetters' rattle
And in the groans of slaves meseems
I hear a voice: "In life's fierce battle,
O child, there is no room for dreams."

The Intruder

ONCE in my secluded chamber,
Late at night, I read
Israel's ancient, wondrous story;
How he shone, and shed

Light around him, in his homeland
Thriving free and great.
Then my thoughts passed slowly onward
To his present fate.

Israel, homeless, footsore, captive,
Into exile goes,
And the world has long forgotten
What to him it owes.

"Gentile world! you have polluted
Springs from which you drank."
In such sad recriminations,
On my couch I sank.

. . . . . .

Stealthily an old man entered
My secluded room;
On his breast a cross suspended,
In his eyes deep gloom.

"You accused me, and I answer:
Yours, not mine, the blame
For your exile, for your downfall,
For your grief and shame.

Not I, no, but you polluted
Your eternal spring;
Home and faith and pride abandoned,
And to exile cling.

'Tis you who at alien altars
Kneel to alien gods;
You who, as in cast-off garments,
Deal in cast-off thoughts;

Gather crumbs from strangers' tables,
Colder crumbs than stone;
And you glory that you have no
Table of your own.

Faith and truth and pride—all treasures
You did prize of old;
For a lentil-mess your birthright
Long ago you sold.

You no longer feel the horror
Of a slave's disgrace;
Do you ask me to respect you,
Honor such a race?

You of old had heroes, prophets,
Noble, great, and true;
How much of their daring spirit
Is there left in you?

Maccabeans as your forebears
In your boast you claim;
If they knew their grandsons, they would
Die again—of shame!

Dead is all your pride and valor,
Dead your sacred tongue;
Speech of bards and kings and prophets
To oblivion flung.

And your home that waits deserted
Do you e'er recall?
Where are all your rich and mighty,
Mammon's high priests all?

Like deserters they are sailing
Under foreign flags—
Lackeys, who their masters' mantles
Wear to hide their rags.

Crumbs of bread and beggars' lodging—
Dare no more expect!
No, a race that loses honor
No one can respect!

Now good-by, and cease to blame me
For your shame and yoke."

. . . . . .

"Stay!" I shrieked, "I wish to answer!
Stay!"—and I awoke.

The Wanderer

WITH my wanderer's staff in hand,
Thus I tramp from land to land,
Nowhere finding home and rest
For my wounded, weary breast,
Ever hearing all day long
Ev'rywhere the same old song:
Round the earth, and to and fro,
Ever go!
Go, no clime must you allure,
Go, you are too rich, too poor,
Go, you are too weak, too strong,
Go along!
Brother dear, oh, dost thou know—
Where to go?

Go from North—for life's sake go;
Go from West—for our sake go;

Go from here—you seem too pale;
Go from there—you look too frail;
Go, you are too weak, too bold,
Go, you are too young, too old,
Go—too simple, go—too clever,
Go forever!
Here a peril, there a danger,
Ev'rywhere a stranger, stranger,
Ev'rywhere, all men among—
Go along!
Brother dear, oh, dost thou know—
Where to go?

Friends who feel my pain and shame
Bid me back to whence I came,
To the clime that drove me least,
Bid me seek the East, the East.
There, they say, I'll refuge find,
There, they say, the skies are kind,

There I'll rest my weary head,
Plough my field, and eat my bread.
There I'll rest and there I'll toil.
Sow the seed, and love the soil;
Where my fathers lived and died,
There my new life should be tried.
But my elder brothers say:
All the world I would betray!
Go to East—oh, what a whim!
All the earth I would bedim.
And they urge me, and they say:
"Stay away!"
Brother dear, oh, dost thou know—
Where to go?

You Comfort Me

YOU comfort me that I am living,
While mighty nations were effaced;
But tell me, dearest, which is nobler,
A freeman's death or life disgraced?

Two brothers lived; one killed the other;
Rest in the grave found he who died;
But I, like Cain, am doomed to wander,
Abel's repose I am denied.

"Forever live," I hear an echo,
"Removed from earth, remote from sky;
And strange alike to man and angel,
You dare not live, you shall not die!"

A Ghetto Musician

THE hall was bright, the guests were gay,
In festal garb arrayed;
Unheeded by the piano sat
A gloomy, dark-eyed maid.

It seemed as though the piano smiled,
With dazzling milk-white teeth;
The maiden touched it, and it wept
Her fingers swift beneath.

And straight a sudden thrill of grief
Passed through the feasting throng,
And old and young were bowed before
The pathos of her song.

I knew the player, knew her race,
Her birthplace and belief;
I knew the music of her soul,
Her wordless song of grief—

The soul that treasured in its depths
  The drama of a race;
The song a distant ghetto nursed,
  Her dismal native place.

Of vanished hopes, of buried dreams,
  Complained her sad, sweet song:
What brought—I mused—this child of grief
  To this gay, feasting throng?

No answer came; a spellbound crowd
  Stood motionless around;
Eyes dimmed with tears, hearts beating fast,
  Still sought each magic sound.

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Sand and Stars

(After Frug)

THE silver moon shines, and the diamond stars twinkle,
Night hovers o'er land and o'er main;
The Book of Creation before me lies open—
I read it again and again.

I read and re-read the old, marvelous stories—
A voice I hear calling to me:
"My people shall be as the stars in the heaven,
As sand on the shore of the sea!"

O heavenly Father, not one of Thy sayings
Has ever proved vain or untrue:
Thy will on the earth, as Thy will in the heaven,
Must come when its season is due.

And half of Thy promise indeed is accomplished:
Thy people became as the sand—
As gloomy and trampled, as humble and wind-tossed,
As scattered on sea and on land.

Yea, half of Thy promise has long been accomplished—
Thy people is trodden as sod;
But what of the beauteous, the lofty, the shining,
The heavenly stars, O my God?

A Ghetto Cradle-Song

SLEEP, my boy, the night is treading
On its tiptoes still:
Gold the twinkling stars are shedding
Over vale and hill.

Golden stars the sky bejewel,
And they spark and glow;
Sleep before you know how cruel
Is our life below.

Sleep, my boy, the moon is swimming
In a silver stream;
Dozing lakes with crystal brimming
Dream a golden dream.

Gold and silver we may borrow
From the skies o'erhead;
Care awakens with the morrow,
Care for daily bread.

Sleep, my boy, the birds are trilling
From each tree and nest:
"Night is sacred, night is filling
Wood and vale with rest."

Leaf and blade by breezes shaken
Softly whisper bliss;
Sleep, my boy, before you waken
Calm on earth to miss.

Sleep, my boy, and dream of heaven,
Dream of joy and mirth;
Heaven's dreams to us are given
To forget the earth.

Sleep, my boy, for clouds may gather
Heaven's charm to mar;
Up in heaven is your father
Shining as a star.

Sleep, my boy, the angels mind you
In your tiny bed;
Earth is wide, but who will find you
Room to rest your head?

Sleep, the night is softly treading,
Kindling lakes and streams;
Gold the twinkling stars are shedding,
Gold—in dreams, in dreams.

The Wandering Jew

COME hail, and gale, and thunder—
My goal I shall pursue;
My path I tread asunder—
The world's reproach and wonder—
The ever-wandering Jew.

For false is that vile story
That I conspire to die:
My goal is life and glory,
My aim since ages hoary
To life from death to fly.

And though my saviour dally
To end my grief and woe,
Through desert, hill, and valley,
Through sordid ghetto alley,
On, ever on, I go.

For like a searching ranger
I learned the earth to roam;
I heed no ill, no danger,
Am everywhere a stranger,
Yet everywhere at home.

Though nations may abhor me,
Though hate and scorn I find,
A guiding star shines o'er me,
A glorious goal before me,
A martyr's path behind.

The scoffer's scorn and laughter
Shall never bar my way;
My faith, my strongest rafter,
Foretells a golden "after,"
A great and glorious day.

No night my soul can frighten,
No cloud-beshrouded skies;

My robe of faith I tighten,
And wait till day shall brighten,
The sun of love shall rise.

May king or kingdom-monger
Believe in might and sword,
But I, with faith yet stronger,
Shall trust, though suffer longer,
In God's eternal word.

With faith, my wealth and chattel,
I fear no warrior's fate;
Around the swords may rattle,
But I shall leave the battle
Triumphant, free, and great.

Of heroes old a scion,
With God in field I camp;
He wakens Judah's lion,
To light once more in Zion
A world-illuming lamp.

The Eternal Riddle

ISRAEL, my people,
God's greatest riddle,
Will thy solution
Ever be told?

Fought—never conquered,
Bent—never broken,
Mortal—immortal,
Youthful, though old.

Egypt enslaved thee,
Babylon crushed thee,
Rome led thee captive,
Homeless thy head.

Where are those nations
Mighty and fearsome?
Thou hast survived them,
They are long dead.

Nations keep coming,
Nations keep going,
Passing like shadows,
Wiped off the earth.

Thou an eternal
Witness remainest,
Watching their burial,
Watching their birth.

Pray, who revealed thee
Heaven's great secret:
Death and destruction
Thus to defy?

Suffering torture,
Stake, inquisition—
Prithee, who taught thee
Never to die?

Ay, and who gave thee
Faith, deep as ocean,
Strong as the rock-hills,
Fierce as the sun?

Hated and hunted,
Ever thou wand'rest,
Bearing a message:
God is but one!

Pray, has thy saga
Likewise an ending,
As its beginning
Glorious of old?

Israel, my people,
God's greatest riddle,
Will thy solution
Ever be told?

Isaiah's Vision

THREE thousand years ago,
The Hebrew prophet's soul
Through countless ages saw
The far-off human goal.

When life was base and vile,
And chained was human thought,
He to a heathen world
A godly message brought.

"A time will come when man,"
Proclaimed the noble seer,
"To plough shall turn his sword,
To pruning-hook his spear,

His field of fire and blood,
To field of golden corn;
In human heart new love,
New glory shall be born.

All nations unto peace
  Shall give their mind and heart,
And lift no sword, nor learn
  The warrior's godless art."

. . . . . .

Three thousand years have passed;
  And though the prophet's dream
As yet is unattained,
  And force still reigns supreme,

The prophet's people prove
  To men the human goal:
That mightier than the sword
  Is heart, and mind, and soul;

That mightier than the sword
  Is God's eternal word;
The prophet's people live
  In spite of fire and sword.

The Lotus Plant

OF the lotus plant a story
Comes to us from ancient time;
Those who tasted of its flower
Soon forgot their native clime.

In the East there is a country,
Where my people's star once shone;
Since it set in utter blackness,
Centuries have come and gone;

But I cannot yet forget it,
Though I roam the earth around,
For that precious lotus flower
I have nowhere, nowhere found;

And my people's ancient country
Ever looms before my eyes,
With its hills and plains and gardens,
With its deep and sapphire skies;

With its lily-spangled valleys,
Groves of cedar, palm, and vine,
With its sacred sites, where erstwhile
Trod the fathers of our line.

Ev'ry sunbeam, bird, or flower
To my vision ever brings
Hills and valleys that have cradled
Heroes, prophets, bards, and kings.

But a lorn, sequestered stranger,
Lo, I wander through the West,
Ever dreaming, ever longing,
Never finding peace or rest.

Of my kindred I make question,
While from land to land I roam:
"You that tasted of the lotus,
And in exile made your home,

Can you tell me, happy people,
Can you tell me in what part
Grows that blessèd magic flower
That shall heal my pining heart?"

But they gaze at me in wonder,
Shake their heads and turn away;
And they mock me as a dreamer,
And I plod my lonely way.

In what Gilead their balm grew
They keep hidden from my quest;
So I pine, pine for my homeland,
With no plant to give me rest.

To the Skylarks

THE skylarks sing to me
A song of mirth and glee,
I feel their airy gladness,
They soar so high and free.

O singers in the sky,
If but to you could I
Pour out my inner sadness,
You would not sing, but cry.

My People's Woes

IF my voice in singing trembles,
If my song a sigh resembles,
Far too sad appears,
Do not, friend, with blame approach me,
Do not, friend, in haste reproach me,
When I sing through tears.

For my song its sadness borrows
From my people's woes and sorrows,
Boundless as the sea;
Early I became acquainted
With a life that fate had painted
All too black for me.

Friend, to witness I was fated
How its triumph celebrated
Darkness over light;
How man's greed, and lust, and blindness,
Scoffed at virtue, grace, and kindness,
Crushing right by might.

Friend, I saw that people driven
That to mankind once had given
Truth and light on earth;
Saw it hunted, shamed, and banished,
Saw its faith in mankind vanished,
'Mid a mob's wild mirth.

Friend, Gehenna's blaze and fuel
I beheld, when mad and cruel
Baal his victims claimed:
Maidens shamed and broken-hearted,
Mothers from their children parted,
Infants rent and maimed.

And the curses that were uttered,
And the prayers that were muttered
To avert the wrong,
Sobs, and groans, and sighs heaved vainly,
Now perforce re-echo plainly
In my dismal song.

And if thus my voice is trembling,
And my song, a sigh resembling,
Like a tear-stream flows,
Dearest friend, you must forgive me:
'Tis not I that cry, believe me—
'Tis my people's woes.

The Hour

FOR the land of Red Tsars and Black Hundreds,
Where the far-off Siberian plains
Hide the graves of the martyrs for justice,
Telling tales of queen Freedom in chains;

For the land of Red Tsars and Black Hundreds,
For the "holy" unholiest clime,
Where the traffic in vice is rewarded,
And belief in one God is a crime;

For the land of Red Tsars and Black Hundreds,
Where the knife and the knout are untamed,
Where my brothers are ages-long tortured,
And my sisters are branded and shamed;

For the land of Red Tsars and Black Hundreds,
An echo approaches my ears,
Proclaiming the hour of God's vengeance
For our innocent blood and our tears!

To England

THOU art not my stepmother, England,
My sister of mercy thou art,
Who healed with a balsam of freedom
The sore of a wanderer's heart.

I had not a motherland, England;
The land that had given me birth
Denied to my sorely-tried people
A haven of rest on God's earth.

In childhood I learnèd to love thee,
Thy name was a legend to me;
I dreamt of a distant great island,
Where men may be strong, yet be free.

And I, who the clatter of fetters
Have heard in my childhood and youth,
Do bless thee for giving me refuge
And faith in the triumph of truth.

Thou are not my stepmother, England,
My sister of mercy thou art;
For thee in the hour of thy trial
A brotherly love fills my heart.

The Last

(After the Hebrew)

THIS the key of Thy Temple's gates
Into my hands Thou gavest, saying:
"I make thee watchman o'er my House,
A watchman, and a master too:
And thou shalt watch my holy House,
And open wide its gates
To those who knock at them,
With yearning heart."
And I—I faithfully kept watch,
And day and night did wait
For parchèd men to come
And drink the water of Thy blessed spring.
The key with rust is covered in my hand.
I heard a murmur and a noise around,
But none inquired for the House of God.

Alone Thy gates I opened,
Alone I stood and prayed,
And to myself I said:
'Tis time to close.
And, growing old, and grey, and frail,
I breathèd my last prayer,
And in the dusty curtain of the ark
I lapped my head and wept aloud,
For great was my disgrace.
And when Thy House, O God, I left,
I saw the last dark shadows creep
And follow in my steps.

The Stranger in London

HIS forehead is wrinkled,
His eyes, sad and deep,
Those eyes that tell mutely
How often they weep;

And tall is his stature,
And pale is his face;
I know without asking
His faith and his race.

He passes my window,—
His voice I know well—
Sweet oranges, apples
He offers to sell.

The urchins torment him,
When he is alone,
At times with their mocking,
At times with a stone.

He eyes them in silence;
And as they disperse,
I see his lips mutter—
A prayer, or a curse.

One day I endeavored
His gloom to dispel,
I cheered him, and begged him
His life-tale to tell.

His sad tale he told me
In words all too few,
The tale of a martyr,
The tale of a Jew.

His stepmother country
Deprived him of home,
And made him a vagrant,
The wide world to roam.

And helpless, and friendless,
And speechless, and weak,
He came to this island
A refuge to seek.

In solitude living,
Uncared for, unknown,
He prays that the urchins
May leave him alone.

The Hebrew

YOU bid me to bury my sorrows,
And cease o'er my burdens to rave;
But where shall I find on this planet
As vast as my sorrows a grave?

The Stranger

OPEN, child, your wicket,
Let me in, I pray;
Tired am I from wand'ring,
Long is still my way.

What my name is, ask you?
Why reveal my shame?
On my long, long journey
I forgot my name.

Wonder you I come by
This unbeaten track?
Storm, by chance, has brought me,
Storm will take me back.

And the land I come from?
O, in ev'ry part
You will find the traces
Of my wounded heart.

Why without a torchlight
In a night so dark?
Tempests in the desert
Quenched it, spark by spark.

Have I any friends here?
Many a one and none;
None, when I am with them,
Many, when I'm gone.

And the land I go to?
That would mean a goal;
There's no land nor people
Stays my restless soul.

Everywhere a native,
Everywhere a guest;
All I pray and crave for
Is a moment's rest.

David's Harp

(Dedicated to my dear friend Dr. Charles Weitzmann)

A harp hung above David's bed, and every midnight a north wind breathed upon it, and its strings played of themselves.

—*Tractate Berakot.*

AS the silver moon, while climbing
In a summer night the crystal
Walls of heaven through the cloudland,
Casts its mellow, dreamy moonbeams
On the paths and roads deserted,
On the temples and the castles,
Dreaming like enchanted giants
By the watching ghost-like shadows;
Thus in memory arising
Sometimes through life's sombre cloudland
Images long, long forgotten,
Charming sagas, ancient legends,
Stories quaint I heard in childhood
From my Rabbi in my Cheder,

Cast their tender light, illuming
The deserted, gloomy chambers
Of my grief-encompassed heart.

In the chamber of king David,
Of Jerusalem's great ruler,
Hangs an old, a golden harp.
Night by night, at the hour of midnight,
When all mortals rest in slumber,
And all angels hymns are chanting,
Blows a north breeze, softly touching
With its breath the strings the golden,
And the harp, as though by magic,
Of itself begins to play.
Soon the king those sounds awaken;
Swiftly from his couch he rises,
Through the night, until the sunrise,
Chants his wondrous psalms and hymns.
And those songs possess a power,
A great, hidden, sacred power,
Which reverberates their echo

In each human heart and soul,
And they pierce the hearts of mortals,
Drawing from the depths of feeling
All the pearls and all the corals
Of emotion and of thought.

Midnight peals. Unearthly music
Fills the chamber of king David,
Melodies in which the singer
Hears the voice of God and nature,
Sometimes speaking through the breezes,
Sometimes through the howling tempest;
Sometimes like a streamlet flowing,
Sometimes raging like the sea.
Oft a mighty voice arises,
Like a fiery thunder rolling
O'er the wide Arabian desert;
Like the wild Simoon, unfettered,
Yelling in its angry effort
To uproot the hoary cedars
Of king Lebanon the snow-crowned.

Like the Red Sea's heaving bosom,
Tossed and tumbled by the tempest,
Vale-like sinking, mount-like rising,
As it foams, and yawns, and threatens
To engulf the rocks above it.
Then the poet's psalms re-echo
Voices angry as the tempest:
"He layeth the beams of His chambers
In the waters,
He walketh upon the wings
Of the wind;
At the voice of Thy thunder they haste away;
They go up like mountains,
They go down like valleys."
Yea, the roaring waves and thunder
Then his songs reverberate.

Oft a melody starts flowing,
Soft and calm like the Shiloah,
Gently rolling lucent billows
To the velvet shore, caressing,

Wooing tenderly the willows;
Like the ripple of the far-off
Murmuring fountains of En-gedi;
Like the whisper of the young ears
In the cornfields of Beth-lehem,
When the spring breeze lulls to rest.
Then the singer's strain re-echoes
Nature's voices sweet and tender:
"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
He leadeth me beside the still waters."
And the music of the harp-strings
And the words, sublime and charming,
Fuse into one wondrous hymn.

Oft a melody upsurges
Full of immemorial sorrow,
Like the speechless supplication
Of a lone, forsaken soul;
Of a soul that gropes in darkness,
Seeing no escape, no outlet
From its melancholy fate;

Like the sob of stricken parents,
Watching hopelessly the death-bed
Of their only darling child.
Then the singer, gravely, sadly,
Sings his melancholy song:
"The pains of death encompass me,
The woes of Sheol got hold upon me,
I found but grief and woe."
And the echo of his strain is
Through the night a thrill of grief.

Oft a melody awakens,
Flowing like a sacred prayer,
Like a love dream first unfolding
In the pure heart of a maiden,
Raising feelings and emotions,
Yearnings, hopes till then unknown;
Like a quaint, mysterious vision,
Woven in a poet's fancy,
Carrying him, as though by magic,

On the wings of inspiration,
Into spheres from mortals hidden,
Into spheres of boundless beauty,
To a space of light and rapture,
Charming vistas, wondrous views.
There the singer hears a chorus
Of angelic hosts in heaven,
Chanting, glorifying, praising
The Creator of the worlds;
And the singer joins the chorus,
To the sound of magic harp-strings:
"Praise Him, praise Him, all ye angels,
Praise Him, all ye hosts of light,
Praise Him, heavens of the heavens,
Every soul shall praise the Lord."

Nightly thus the harp is playing,
Nightly thus the king is singing
Songs of rest and songs of tempest,
Of life's joys, and of life's burdens,
Man's despair, his hopes and longings,

Songs of nature and of God—
All the deepest heart emotions,
All most sacred aspirations
Are re-echoed in his songs.
Thus the twins by song begotten—
Speech of heart and sound of heaven—
Did present the world and mankind
With the Psalter, Book of Life;
And the echo of that life book
Ever hovers in the world-space
Over hill, and dell, and desert;
In the prince's gorgeous palace,
In the pauper's gloomy cottage,
Every human heart it touches.
It entrances and inspires,
Fills with thoughts and yearnings great.
Ages come and go. Like actors
On the stage appearing, changing,
On the earth—the stage of mankind—
Countries, nations ever change.

Ages come and go; but one thing,
One, alas! remains forever—
Strife and struggle unabated,
'Twixt the races, creeds, and nations.
Men have never yet discovered
How between them (fateful secret!)
Earth and heaven should be shared . . .
Yet amid the wild confusion,
And the chaos of man's conflicts,
When God's reason sobers mankind
Of its war intoxication,
And a momentary truce is
On the battlefield proclaimed—
Then in synagogues, cathedrals,
And in churches, and in cloisters,
And wherever man, inspired,
Lifts his troubled soul in prayer,
Magic sounds ascend the heavens,
Songs that stream from sacred fountains
In the human soul deep hidden,

And they ease life's heavy burdens,
Bringing comfort, help, and peace.
Listen to those words and music,
Whosoever, friend, you may be,
You will recognize these songs.
Still king David's harp is chiming,
Still its strings remain unbroken,
Still unsilenced are its echoes,
While the ages come and go . . .
Everlasting and eternal
It is, like man's living spirit,
Like the firmament above us,
Like the people of the King.

Israel, glorious are thy legends,
And they are of thee a portion;
For thy legends still are living,
And thy life—a legend still.

Two Angels

EVERY Friday, when the west
Lures the golden sun to rest
And the gloomy earth to cheer,
Diamond stars in sky appear;
When queen Sabbath comes on earth,
Bringing heaven's joy and mirth,
Worry, toil, and gloom to end,
Angels two from sky descend—
Angels two, one kind and bright,
But the other, dark as night.
And around the world they soar,
Halting at each Jewish door.
When their eyes lit candles meet,
When bright faces Sabbath greet,
When sweet songs and anthems fair
Show that peace hath banished care,

Anger, and the daily grind,
Then the angel mild and kind
Utters blessings: "Like to-night
Ever shall your life be bright;
Never, never, shall you miss
Soul's contentment, deepest bliss."
And his mate, with gloomy eyes,
"Amen" to his words replies.
But when they a household see
Void of joy, of Sabbath glee,
Not a candle, not a spark,
Room and faces sad and dark,
Work and strife and Satan's wiles,
Then the evil angel smiles,
And he hastes to speak his curse:
"Ever go from bad to worse,
Every day and all life through
Peace shall be denied to you."
And his mate, with tearful eyes,
"Amen" says, and sadly cries.

Messiah

(A talmudic legend)

AND Daniel begged the angel of the Lord:
"O tell me, pray, of that salvation true
Jehovah will unto His people bring,
So that my soul may rest and tranquil be."
And thus the angel spoke, and made reply:
"On that great day Messiah, Judah's king,
Shall lift his flag upon the Zion Hill,
On that great day the Temple will be built,
By Judah's foe no more to be destroyed.
That day Messiah, God's anointed king,
With him Elijah, Judah's prophet true,
The holy Mount of Olives shall ascend,
And king to prophet thus will give command:
'Arise, O Tishbite, sound thy clarion high!'
And as the clarion peals shall wake the earth,
A light more brilliant and more dazzling still

Than when Jehovah first created light
Shall shine, and clothe the earth from end to end.
That light shall heal and cheer the sick and grieved;
And when once more the trumpet's peals are heard,
The dead shall wake, and, rising from their tombs,
Shake off the clods that kept them cold and dumb.
And friend shall cheer and glad the heart of friend,
And mother shall embrace her child with joy,
And from the east and west, and north and south,
They, swiftly come as on an eagle's wings,
Shall flock, and to Messiah wend their way.
And thus the joyous message shall be spread:
'The day has come the Lord designed of yore;
Let all rejoice, let all be glad this day.'
And when again the trumpet's sound is heard,
The Lord, surrounded by His angel troops,
In light and glory shall appear on earth.

And when once more the prophet's trumpet
sounds,
The hills and mounts shall sink, the valleys rise;
And where the Tabor once and Carmel Hill,
And where the Olive Mount and Hermon stood,
A flowery plain shall far and wide extend.
And then the Lord His angels will command,
To raise once more the Temple's golden gates
The earth kept buried in its entrails vast,
Since Judah's foe the holy fane destroyed."

The Dead Assembly

(Ballad)

EACH midnight, each midnight they march out in crowds,
With bundles of faggots concealed in their shrouds,
Their eyes like quenched embers, their faces like clouds—
They march to Madrid, and they stay;
And where Torquemado's cathedral once stood,
The spot that is stained with their ashes and blood,
They open their shrouds, and drop bundles of wood,
And kindle an auto-da-fé.

A gray-bearded sage in a turban and shawl,
Of princely demeanor, and stately, and tall,
Then beckons for silence, and speaks to them all
In tones that make tremble the sod:

"This flame shall bear witness to agèd and youth,
That men who taught mankind God's mercy and truth
Were cast into flames for proclaiming His truth,
And burnt for the name of their God.

And night after night shall be kindled this flame,
And glare on the land as a brand-mark of shame.
Forever the land of inquisitors' fame
To men as a curse shall go down;
Forever the blood of the martyrs shall stain
The highways and byways and pavements of Spain:
We swear that our children shall never again
Return to the blood-spotted town."

Then each of the martyrs holds down his right hand,
And lifts from the fire-heap a smouldering brand,
And mutters an oath and a curse on the land,
And slowly moves backward away.

Thrice "Amen" calls out the retreating dead
crowd,
Thrice "Amen" re-echo the mountains aloud,
And over Madrid spreads a thickening cloud,
And stays till the dawn of the day.

Satan and Haman

(After the Talmud)

WHEN the Persian Haman
Thrilled and throbbed with joy,
At the gladsome prospect
Israel to destroy;

Satan, likewise joyful,
Brought to God the news,
Bade Him sign the verdict
To destroy the Jews.

The Almighty answered:
"Thy request is good,
But my seal, ere signing,
Must be dipped in blood.

Bring some human blood, then,
Shed by Jewish hands."
Forthwith sped old Satan
Over seas and lands,

Searching every highway,
Every cave and wood;
But, alas, he could not
Find such human blood.

Then, to God returning,
He brought back the tale:
"Cowards are Thy people,
And of heart too frail."

The Aggada

WHENE'ER with woes
My heart o'erflows,
Yet will no hope surrender,
From pain and grief
I seek relief
In tales of ancient splendor.

And then I scan
The talisman
Engraved by Israel's sages,
The tales of old
The Rabbis told
In far-off, wondrous ages.

My pain is stilled,
My heart is filled
With joyous, deep emotion;
I sail in glee
The boundless sea,
The great talmudic ocean.

And life does seem
A wondrous dream,
Through paths of mystery winding;
How I rejoice
To hear the voice
Of childhood's days reminding!

I sail, I swim
Through streams that brim
With silver-gliding waters.
On beach and shore
I meet once more
Fair Judah's sons and daughters.

And ev'rywhere
Resounds the air
With sweet old Zion's ditties,
And far and wide
On ev'ry side
Arise old Judah's cities.

And as of yore
I see once more
The land of milk and honey;
The landscapes quaint
That once did paint
The Rabbi Bar-Bar-Choney.

With him I ride,
Through countries wide,
To phantom realms and peoples;
My oarless boat
O'er seas does float,
I climb on magic steeples.

On elfin wings
I visit kings,
And rest in beauteous Eden;
In Ophir's fields,
Where David's shields
And treasures rare are hidden.

O Talmud great,
Thou dost relate
The tale of silent ages;
But canst thou tell
Who gave such spell
To thy unfading pages?

The Rabbi and the Princess

(From the Talmud)

"RABBI," said a heathen princess,
To a Hebrew chief,
"You, a man so wise, how can you
Follow your belief,
Since your God, the great Jehovah,
Acted like a thief?

For He cast a sleep on Adam,
And, without his leave,
Took a rib from out his body,
Made the woman Eve.
Rabbi, in such wise act only
Robbers, I believe."

"Princess," said the Rabbi, "if you
Wish to judge aright,
Just permit me now to tell you
What occurred one night,
When a man my chamber entered,
Hid from people's sight.

In my isolated cottage,
On the barren wold,
I possessed a lamp of copper,
Tarnished, bent, and old.
And he stole it. But instead he
Left a lamp of gold.

Tell me, was this man a robber,
Can he thus be named?"
"No! he was your benefactor!"
She, surprised, exclaimed;
Then, the Rabbi's smile beholding,
Turned and blushed, half-shamed.

Kindling the Sabbath Light

FROM memory's spring flows a vision to-night:
My mother is kindling and blessing the light.

The light of queen Sabbath, the heavenly flame
That one day in seven quells hunger and shame.

A stream in the desert, 'mid thistles a rose,
Is Sabbath 'mid week-days, the queen of repose.

She comes with a torch to expel daily gloom,
And kindles the soul of her lover and groom.

My mother is praying, and screening her face,
Too bashful to gaze at the Sabbath light's grace.

She murmurs devoutly: "Almighty, be blessed
For sending Thy angel of joy and of rest.

And may as the candles of Sabbath divine
The eyes of my son in Thy Law ever shine." . . .

Of childhood, fair childhood, the years are long
fled:
Youth's candles are quenched, and my mother is
dead.

And yet ev'ry Friday, when twilight arrives,
The face of my mother within me revives;

A prayer on her lips: "O Almighty, be blessed
For sending us Sabbath, the angel of rest."

And some hidden feeling I cannot control
A Sabbath light kindles deep, deep in my soul.

The Imprisoned Princess

MANY tales my mother told me,
But I have them all
Under foreign skies forgotten,—
One I still recall.

On an island stands a tower
Barred with iron gates;
There a princess, long imprisoned,
For her lover waits,

Gazing from her prison window
Through the iron bars,
Day by day the sun beseeching,
Night by night, the stars:

"Is my lover's heart still faithful,
Loving as before?
Will he ever come, release me,
As in youth he swore?

Come in knightly shield and armor,
Come to set me free,
That we both may flee together
Far o'er land and sea;

Flee, until a wondrous island
Will our sight allure,
Where the brooks are pure as crystal,
And man's heart as pure;

In the lap of mother nature
There to love and live,
All our woes forget in rapture,
All our foes forgive?"

Mother, I that tale remember,
Childhood's saddest tale;
And, meseems, I know the princess,
See her sad and pale,

As she daily at the casement
Of her cell appears;
Feel her sorrows, grief, and anguish,
See her eyes in tears.

And myself her pain and anguish
Often I share, too;
And I, too, believe her vision
Will one day come true.

Come he will, her true redeemer,
Break her prison gate;
But I fear, I fear, O mother,
He may be too late!

My Mother's Song

A CRADLE-SONG my mother sang,
So deep, so sweet, so sad it rang.
Of mother I am long bereft,
But why is still her sadness left,
To live in every song of mine,
In ev'ry line?

O mother dear,
Where did you hear
That air that taught your darling lad
A song so sad?
And where have I the sadness found?
In mother's voice, or word, or sound,
Or in her melancholy mood,
Or in her pearly tear that stood
In her eye, trembling ere it fell?—
I cannot tell!

The song I never understood,
And strange to me was mother's mood;
The words I have forgotten long,
The voice is silent, like the song.

The eye is closed; the tear is dry;
The sadness cannot die.
And in my happiest moods and dreams
I ever hear that song meseems;
And when I muse of love and bliss,
I never miss
That lullaby of sadness deep—
And I must weep.

The Dying Poet

(After the Yiddish)

WHITE the robe, and white the "sister,"
Bed and linen likewise white;
On his bed lies pale the singer,
In his eyes dies out the light.

White the face, and white the pillow,
But his lips and eyes are dark;
By his bed I stand in anguish,
See the last expiring spark.

"Comrade, see, I bring you flowers,
Tokens of the world's esteem;
Tell me, comrade, what you wish for,
And of what it is you dream."

But he looks, with eyes imploring,
  Murmurs something hard to hear;
Smiling gloomily and faintly,
  Beckons, whispers in my ear:

"All is over. . . . Drama ended . . .
  Far too early came the end. . . .
Have you, brother, yet looked over,
  My new poem in *The Friend?*

'Life and Youth'—you must have read it . . .
  There two syllables are wrong . . .
'Tis not my fault . . . 'Tis a misprint . . .
  They have spoiled that charming song. . . .

'Life and Youth,' my latest poem,
  Written but a week ago;
Just two syllables are missing,—
  Brother, let the people know. . . .

Tell them, pray, it is an error . . .
  Just an error . . ." "Dearest friend!

Your last wish shall be respected,
I your honor must defend.

'Gainst your 'Life and Youth,' misprinted,
None shall breathe a word of blame.
That the world may not misjudge you,
This I solemnly proclaim:

In the Jewish 'Life and Youth' song,
Sung amidst our cruel strife,
Just two syllables are missing:
One is *youth* and one is *life!*"

The First Snow

FAIRY-LIKE on earth advancing,
All transforming, all entrancing,
Playing on their way and dancing,
Soil-untarnished yet,

Silver stars from sky are dropping,
Little fairies skipping, hopping,
On the roofs and turrets popping,
Crowns with diamonds set.

Greeting nature's silver wedding,
Argent splendor they are shedding,
And a bridal veil outspreading,
Like a silver net;

Till town-alleys, foul and tainted,
Turn cathedral-aisles ensainted,
Carved with gorgeous, ermine-painted,
Ornamental fret.

How all changed by elfin power!
Every house a magic tower,
Every tree with lilac-flower
Lures like a coquette.

Following in their magic traces,
Hidden joy each heart embraces,
Sparkling eyes and brightened faces
Everywhere are met.

How I love you, white-robed city,
Maiden-pure, and maiden-pretty!
But my love is—what a pity!—
Tempered with regret.

Truer lover you would find me,
If you were not to remind me
Of a cold land left behind me
That I'd fain forget.

By Night

THE night is fair, the night is still.
God's spirit soars o'er vale and hill;
I dream again fair childhood's dreams;
The world a temple is, meseems,
The beaming silver moon in sky
Its lamp eternal is on high;
And far behind the dots that spark
There lies concealed a holy ark,
O'er which the sky—its curtain blue—
Is set with stars—with diamonds true;
Around on earth, where'er I look,
I see an open, sacred book,
Whose every page—each hill and vale—
Relates a hidden, sacred tale.

The night is still, and on my way
I hear a congregation pray—

The crooning streams, the lilting rills,
The solemn woods, the musing hills.
Each stalk and blade, each rush and plant,
Their sacred hymns to heaven chant.
Each tender flower, full of grace,
In fragrant tones sings heaven's praise.
O'er field and mead the breeze goes round,
And carries blessings in its sound.
In wood and valley, everywhere,
The sacred music fills the air;
The trees, the birds, the waterfall,
They join the chorus, each and all.

On earth an echo hovers round,
And calls: "This earth is holy ground,
Which in His mercy He hath blessed."
And when I heard the voice, I guessed
That all the longings of my heart
And I myself are but a part,
Like ev'rything I hear and see,
Of nature's temple, pure and free.

"How Fair . . ."

He who walks by the way, and says: "How fair is that tree or that field," is as if he had forfeited his soul.
—*Ethics of the Fathers.*

WALKING by the way, when spring is
Bright, and fresh, and mild,
Say not: "O, how fair the garden
Or the field is," child.

All on earth is vain, remember,
All has but one goal;
Saying: "O, how fair the garden,"
You forego your soul.

Rabbi dear, your words are sacred—
This I can't conceal—
I say not: "How fair the garden,"
But I feel, I feel!

Feel the breeze that soothes, entrances,
Like a golden dream;
Feel the flowers shedding perfume
In a fragrant stream.

Hear the rippling brooklet whisper,
And its tongue I know;
Not a word!—but waves of feelings
Sea-like ebb and flow.

Feel the sky, a crystal ocean
Hanging overhead;
Hear on stairs of light in azure
Heaven's angels tread.

And I feel my heart with rapture
Filling to the brim;
In a wave of sounds and sunbeams
I immerse and swim.

Then in the lap of mother nature
Like a child I sink;
From her bosom pure, sweet nectar
Thirstily I drink.

Living wonders in the garden
I see scattered round,
But remain a silent witness,
Utter not a sound.

Rabbi dear, your words are sacred—
This I can't conceal—
I say not: "How fair the garden,"
But I feel, I feel.

Spring

COME with me to wood and field,
Where God's wonders are revealed.
Come and hear the skylark sing
Pæans to the master spring,
Who repaints the world anew,
Earth in green and sky in blue.

Come and see the wakened wood,
That all winter gloomy stood,
How the heaven's golden broom
Sweeps away its wintry gloom.

Come and stray the valleys through,
Dressed in silk and washed in dew;
See the daisy-babes at birth
Suck the breast of mother earth.

Come and see the drowsy streams,
Kissed by heaven's smiling gleams,
Wake, and gaily speed along,
Babbling on their way a song.

Come and see the field revived,
And the shepherd that arrived
Down the hill-slope with his sheep;
Hear his song so sweet and deep:
"Spring comes only"—pipes his fife—
"Once each year, yet once in life."

In the Wood

I COME to thee, O woodland,
From town and men to hide;
To birds, and trees, and flowers,
My heart's woe to confide.

They were my mates in childhood,
We know each other well;
And oft I leave the city
Among these friends to dwell.

And they in turn cry: "Welcome!"
They greet me with a song:
"The sky, and air, and sunshine,
Alike to all belong"—

A truth men have forgotten,
Or have to study yet;
Or, is it that they know it,
And study to forget?

They dole out air and sunshine
  By race, and creed, and birth;
They cannot share God's heaven.
  They cannot share man's earth.—

I come to thee, O woodland,
  In search of peace and rest;
The greedy town and people
  Begloom my weary breast.

The Spring Sky

I LOVE you, O spring sky,
So pure and so mild,
Your smiles and your tears are
The moods of a child.

Your smiles are so beamy,
Your tears are so pearly;
I rise in the morning
To look at you early;

And whether I find that
You smile or you cry,
I cannot but love you,
O child-looking sky.

By the Sea

CALM is the ocean at sunset,
Calm is my heart, too, meseems;
And as the sun in the sea waves
Mirrored in heart are youth's dreams.

Maybe the waves have forgotten
Tempest, and shipwreck, and blast;
But, ah, my heart, it forgets not
All its wrecked dreams of the past.

I Weep

I WEEP for the morning, the fresh, breezy morning,
So bracing, so sweet, and so bright;
I weep for the morning, the fair, sunny morning,
That passed into night.

I weep for the flowers, the sun-cherished flowers,
With fragrance my garden they filled;
I weep for the flowers, the tender, sweet flowers,
Cold autumn has killed.

I weep for the dreams, and the hopes, and the longings,
With rapture my heart they once filled;
I weep for the dreams, and the hopes, and the longings,
Now faded and chilled.

I weep for the heart that so deeply, so truly,
Has loved, and of love known the pain;
I weep for the heart that could love and could suffer,
And suffered in vain.

I Asked the Stars

I ASKED the stars in heaven,
One still and star-lit night:
"Oh, wherefore, tell me, wherefore
So pale and cold your light?

I know that you are light worlds,
A globe each seeming spark;
Such hosts of you shine on us,
Why is our earth so dark?

I know that you are flame worlds,
A sun each dot of gold;
Such hosts of you are burning,
Why is our earth so cold?"

The stars, they did not answer—
We stood so far apart;
A voice replied beside me:
"Inquire within your heart!

Your heart, it, too, is star-like,
A world that seems a spark;
It, too, sheds rays around it—
Why is your path so dark?

It, too, has skyey longings,
And golden dreams untold;
It, too, is burning, burning,
Why is your life so cold?"

In vain the poet's questions
I heard within my breast;
The heart and stars are riddles
No mortal ever guessed.

A Ray

IN his cot my little boy
Lay so pale and weak,
And a golden ray of light
Played upon his cheek.

"Have you come down from the sky?
Tell me, golden ray,
Just to kiss my darling boy,
Take his pain away?

Have the guardian angels then
Sent you from above,
Just to cheer my ailing pet,
Bring him heaven's love?

Or, perchance, you have been sent,
Just to close his eye,
And to take his angel soul
Back into the sky?"

Silent was the golden ray,
  Silent was I, too;
But my darling's pallid face
  Paler, paler grew.

A Tear and a Smile

WHEN in your eye I saw a tear,
You seemed, I know not why,
A child of purer, higher worlds,
A daughter of the sky.

I loved you, and I told you so;
But pardon me, my dear,
I was misled—I loved not you,
I merely loved your tear.

For in a while, when to a smile
Your sparkling eyes gave birth,
You stood a maid, like maidens all,
A daughter of the earth.

I felt at once the spell was gone,
I changed in one short while;
The flame you kindled with your tear
You quenchèd then with your smile.

But still, sometimes I wonder why—
All chemistry to flout—
Your humid tear could light a flame
Your glowing smile put out.

A Spring Night's Dream

THAT spring night through silver
We saw the moon sail,
The sky princess wearing
A dream-woven veil.

The sky princess wearing
A dream-woven veil,
She dreamily told us
Love's wonderful tale.

She dreamily told us
Love's wonderful tale.
How sweet was, O child, then
Thy breath to inhale!

How sweet was, O child, then
Thy breath to inhale,
Like nectar of lilies
That grew down the vale.

Like nectar of lilies
That grew down the vale,
The lilies and lovers
Who'll dare to assail?

"The lilies and lovers
Who'll dare to assail?"
Thus sang us each mountain,
Each hill, and each dale.

Thus sang us each mountain,
Each hill, and each dale,
But youth is so short, and
Our bliss is so frail.

Our youth is so short, and
Our bliss is so frail,
Like shadows they flitted,
Leaving pain in their trail.

Like shadows they flitted,
  Leaving pain in their trail,
And left us in sunder
  Our dream to bewail.

To You

ONCE at parting we felt lonely,
Meetings were so sweet;
Now once more we feel so lonely—
Only when we meet. . . .

Once at parting we would trifle,
But our hearts would cry;
Now we part and sigh, but truly
Hearts and eyes are dry. . . .

Once it used to be a mystery,
Now it seems so plain;
Once we could not, now we would not,
All the truth explain.

A Dream

A GOLDEN dream
I had in May;
Both youth and dream
Have passed away.

My dream is lost,
My youth is o'er;
I mourn them both,
My dream the more.

A youthless life
Still real may seem;
But what is life
Without a dream?

The Last Melody

WHEN the singer's harp is silent,
And no longer sighs or sings,
Come, my dear, 'twixt dark and daylight,
Gently touch the songless strings.

And a miracle will happen:
They will sigh and sing anew;
For a melody is left there,
One last melody—for you.

Sweetly-sad and sadly-joyous,
Like a message from above,
Like the fragrance of the gloaming,
Like the bliss and pain of love.

Come, belovèd, touch the harp-strings,
They will sigh and sing anew;
For that melody lies hidden,
Waiting long, long years for you.

There I hid it sadly-joyous,
When I still was pure and young;
If you come not, it will ever
Hidden there remain, unsung.

To ——

WHEN I was young, and pure, and sound,
I offered you my heart,
But you declined. Since then our ways
Have lain fore'er apart.

My heart was broken. I was left
Alone on earth to pine;
My heart was broken, but the bits,
O, were they yours or mine?

I did not know; but once I took
The tiny, crumbling parts,
And made a song of each. My songs
Are tiny broken hearts.

I sing my song, but do not know
To whom it should belong;
It is not yours, it is not mine—
Pray, who will claim my song?

A Treasure

CHILD, I had no earthly jewels,
Never knew the merchant's art;
All the jewels heaven gave me
Heaven sealed within my heart.

When I offered you my treasure,
You declined, and we did part;
Child, you know not what a treasure
You have missed—a poet's heart.

In a Dream

I WAS sitting alone by the sea-shore,
And watching the waves from a steep;
The clouded sun was just setting,
The waves were lulling to sleep.

I dreamt my mother approached me:
"Why are you so pale, my child?"
The tears in her eyes were trembling,
Though gloomily gazing she smiled.

"O mother, since I left you,
I found no rest and no friend,
I roam a homeless vagrant
The earth from end to end."

She dropped a tear on my forehead.
I woke—it was starting to rain.
The gloom o'er the sea grew deeper,
And deeper grew likewise my pain.

Children

HERE they are, my little darlings,
All their merry throng;
Each of them a sportive fairy,
Each a living song.

Voices—silver bells are chiming;
Eyes—transparent streams,
Deep and sparkling, and reflecting,
Heaven's purest beams.

Little teeth—carved pearly jewels,
Waving gold their hair;
Merry laughter—bells of silver,
Ringing in the air.

Songs they are, the little darlings,
Songs devoid of themes;
When I see them play, there spring up
All my childhood's dreams.

Children and Flowers

YOU ask me, friend, what best I love
In life's most blissful hours,
When earth is bright as heaven above—
I children love and flowers.

I know no gem of greater worth
In this fair world of ours
Than flowers, children of the earth,
And children, earth's fair flowers.

You ask me, friend, what I love best
In life's autumnal hours,
When hearts, like nature, long for rest—
I children love and flowers.

The deepest joy sent from above
To cheer this world of ours
Are flowers, emblems of God's love,
And children, love's pure flowers.

When I Die

WHEN I die—O be it May-time,
When the linnets sweetly trill,
When gay children at their playtime
Hill and vale with gladness fill;

In the dreamy twilight hours,
When the skies are blue and deep,
I should say with dozing flowers:
"Earth, good night!"—and go to sleep.

Flowers, too, should be adorning
That lone grave where I am lain,
Till, like flowers, one fair morning
I awake to life again.

I Will Not Change

I WILL not change my path with you,
O worshippers of gold!
My path is rough, but heaven-lit,
And yours is smooth, but cold.

In your resplendent halls each night
The ghost of envy strides,
Whilst in the castle of my heart
The living God resides.

My heart is young, though youth is gone;
Your hearts in youth are old;
I will not change one golden dream
For all your dreams of gold.

I Sing Like a Bird in the Sky

I SING like a bird in the sky,
Not knowing, not reasoning why;
I sing like the breezes in spring,
I sing when my soul bids me sing.
Whatsoever may start songs and tunes in my heart,
I sing like a bird in the sky.

I sing like the brook and the stream,
And free is my heart-woven dream;
My song from within is ordained,
And fountain-like flows unrestrained.
When with joys or with woes my full heart overflows,
I sing like the brook and the stream.

I sing like the stars in the night,
When weaving their motions of light;
I sing with all nature around;
I sing, for to sing I am bound.
With no aim and no goal, from the soul of my soul,
I sing like the stars in the night.

A Dead Bird

I WALKED in the wood,
And the birds' songs I heard,
So shrill and so sweet,
And my heart was so stirred!
Beneath in the grass
Lay a dead little bird.

I gazed at the bird
That lay mute on the ground;
I heard the sweet songs
That were trilling around;
"Dead singer," I mused,
"Who now misses thy sound?

Where be now the sweet tunes
  In the wood thou hast shed?
New singers, new notes,
  Have taken thy stead;
Who misses his song
  When the singer is dead?

My fate, little songster,
  To thine will be like:
When *my* hour for silence
  Eternal shall strike,
The song and the singer
  Will vanish alike."

Songs and Tears

IN the depth of my heart,
On its grief-riddled bed,
There are songs yet unsung,
There are tears yet unshed.

But the songs and the tears
In one multitude throng,
Till, instead of a tear,
Sometimes bursts out a song.

And the sound of a song
In my soul when I hear,
From my heart to my eye
Rolls a grief-laden tear.

But at times they combine,
Flow together along;
Then I cannot guess which
Is a tear, which a song.

Betrayed

THE night was still and star-lit,
Dumbly I gazed on high;
Only the stars in heaven
Could hear my bosom's sigh.

But the stars betrayed my secret;
My sorrow they revealed
In the sky to every song-bird,
On earth to wood and field.

And now each bird in the forest,
Each fluttering blade and leaf,
Croons and whispers and babbles
My jealously hidden grief.

A Pledge

I PLEDGED my soul on high,
And borrowed love's fair dream,
But lost my dream on earth;
What will my pledge redeem?

Now, forfeited, my soul
Remains a pledge above,
Whilst I on earth in vain
Still seek the dream of love.

Two Sorrows

MY heart was young and cheerful,
Life's care I did not know;
Then came the grief of mankind,
And filled my heart with woe.

Now fate, with years, has brought me,
My own deep grief and pain;
And now my heart is bursting—
It cannot both contain.

And as I feel it bursting,
I call to heav'n and pray:
O God, take mankind's sorrow,
Or else take mine away!

My Heart

FATE, the heartsmith, on his anvil.
Had my glowing heart,
Struck and beat it with his hammer,
And the sparks did dart,
In the smithy's puddles falling
Spark by spark.

When the heart grew cold and hardened,
Fate, the heartsmith, spoke:
"Take thy heart, it was not fitted
For its earthly yoke;
Take it back, I've made it human—
Hard and dark."

Two Fates

CHILD, you say it seems so strange
That my moods and likes so change:

Sad and gay, and meek and proud,
Love each man, and hate the crowd.

Heaven gave me, child, two things:
Lust to fly and cut-off wings.

Bondman's fate and freeman's strife—
These my portions are in life.

Born for joy and made to weep,
Born to soar and taught to creep.

And my soul thus humbly-proud
Is a flame enwrapped in cloud.

This is why I sing and cry,
Crawl on earth, and soar in sky.

This is why I falling rise,
This is why my songs are sighs.

Myself

IN the mellow beams
Of the pallid moon,
In the wordless songs
That the streamlets croon,

In the lays of love
That the linnet trills,
In the zephyr's breath
O'er the vales and hills,

In the sylvan tales
Whispered by the trees,
In the golden dreams
Wafted by the breeze,

In each warbling bird—
Airy little elf—
Everywhere I hear
And I see myself.

If I cease to breathe,
  If I cease to love,
All is mute on earth
  And in the sky above.

My Ideal

WHAT I pray for and desire
Is no treasure, store of gold,
But a soul that can aspire,
And a heart that grows not old;

But a spot, where I may, after
My day's toil is at an end,
Hear gay children's silver laughter,
Watch the sun in gold descend;

But a streamlet cool to greet me,
When I pass through grove and mead,
And a maiden's smile to meet me,
And a poet's page to read.

In my homeland live and labor
As my guide the sky above;
And a palm-grove as my neighbor,
As my friend—the one I love.

To a Rich Friend

I DID not bow to you my head,
To you who from your birth
By slaves were hailed a lord of slaves,
To rule a servile earth.

I did not bow to you my head,
To you whom God did curse;
He put a purse within your heart,
Your heart—within a purse.

I did not bow to you my head,
When I was starved for bread,
Or parched with thirst, or numbed with cold—
I did not bow my head.

When I was starved, I pitied *you*.
My heart for you felt sad;
I would not take your gold—your soul—
The only soul you had.

When starved for bread, or numbed with cold,
I did not bow my head;
For I was rich, and you were poor,
You lacked a soul, I—bread.

To My Rich Brother

I SEE you in your mansion
All-powerful and proud,
Emblazoned in your splendor
Amidst a flattering crowd.

A cottage and a garden
To me on earth belong,
My path in life is humble,
My realm, the realm of song.

And yet, in faith, my brother,
I envy not your part:
He needs no gold, nor jewels
To whom God gave a heart.

Have robes of silk and velvet
As many as you will,
The velvet of my pansies
Is finer woven still.

And may your diamonds glitter,
  And may your opals shine,
The diamond stars are brighter,
  The opal sky is mine.

And be of rare old silver
  Your goblet, dish, and spoon,
My silver is still older—
  The silver of the moon.

From all your hired musicians
  Such tunes you never heard
As on a fair spring morning
  The music of a bird.

Your tapestries and landscapes,
  However rare and quaint—
My sunrise and my sunset
  A finer brush did paint.

Your realm is rich and gorgeous,
  Your realm to me is strange,
My path in life is humble—
  And that I will not change.

But should you ever, brother,
  Feel worn, and tired, and cold,
I know of bliss and pleasures
  You cannot buy for gold.

And should you ever, brother,
  For love and freedom long,
Then come into my garden,
  The realm of love and song.

Harp and Sword

I HAVE no armor, helm, or shield
From life's sore darts to save me;
My weapon in this battlefield
Is but the harp God gave me.

He gave me, too, a heart to sigh
And pine and bleed for others,
When from the field I hear the cry:
"Help! help! we are your brothers."

It thrills me through with anguish sharp
To leave their call unheeded;
"Of what avail," they say, "your harp,
Where spear and sword are needed?"

I cannot meet their burning eyes,
That righteous wrath betoken;
Shamed, dumb, I stand in sorry wise,—
My harp and heart are broken.

A Song

SAY not, child, that in these songs
You have read a part
Of the hopes and dreams that once
Filled the singer's heart.

Child, the poet's fairest dreams
Reach no mortal ears,
For the sweetness of his songs
Only *his* soul hears.

Of his heart-begotten flame
Words are cast-off shades,
Just as rubies shine in rocks,
Pearls in ocean glades,

So the poet's deepest dreams,
Love, and joy, and pain,
Unexpressed in mortal words,
In his heart remain.

The Feast of Spring

IN the sunny days of childhood
From my grandfather I heard
Charming tales of by-gone ages
That my spirit deeply stirred.

Charming tales and ancient legends
That I felt, I knew, were true:
Stories of the hoary ages
That remain forever new.

Of the Pesach-days he told me,
Days that joy and sunshine bring;
Of the Festival of Freedom,
Of revival and of spring.

Of the slave people in Egypt,
Whose hot blood, so rashly spilt,
Soaked into the bricks and mortar
Of the fortresses they built.

How on them, the God-forsaken,
After gloomy, wintry days,
Shone at last the rays of freedom,
Heaven's bright, benignant rays.

How among them rose a prophet,
Like a guiding star by night;
And when pleading for their freedom,
How he crushed a tyrant's might.

How he taught the fettered people
Not in vain their blood to spill;
Turning bondmen into freemen,
Men of honor and of will.

How no despot's might could hinder,
Nor their freedom's march restrain,
Till before their will resistless
Stormy ocean burst in twain.

Then was Israel's glorious springtime,
  After which a summer came,
Followed by a golden harvest,
  Free from yoke and free from shame.

When my grandfather I questioned:
  "How long did that summer last?"
Gloomily he gazed and pondered,
  And he answered me at last:

"Child, it was a long, bright summer,
  But a winter came again;
Came with cold, and mist, and darkness,
  Came with storms of grief and pain.

Frost and tempest—strife, contention—
  Raged once more in every part,
Stealing into souls and freezing
  Will and hope in every heart.

Furious storm once more dispersed us;
Israel, erstwhile free and great,
Into lands of cruel despots
Went to face a bondman's fate."

"Is this winter, prithee, endless?"
Questioning again I sighed;
And two crystal tears were trembling
In his eyes when he replied:

Nay, my boy, it seems but endless,
But it cannot, will not be:
Israel's shackles will be broken,
One fair day he will be free!

In his soul will reawaken
Courage, will, and pride, and might;
Freedom's sunrise, child, will follow
His long, starless exile night.

But till then, ere spring's arrival—
For the wintry steps are slow—
Pesach is a sweet remembrance
Of a spring of long ago."

The Seder

I

COTTAGES whitewashed,
And cosy and neat,
Smilingly waiting
The spring feast to meet.

Happy-faced children
At play here and there,
Perfume and freshness
Of spring in the air.

II

Bashfully blushing,
The sun, like a bride,
Goes down in crimson
In Westland to hide.

Fair is the twilight,
And fragrant and still;
Little by little
The synagogues fill.

One by one kindle
The night's gleaming eyes:
Candles in windows,
And stars in the skies.

III

Ended in *Shul* is
The service divine;
Seder is started
With legends and wine.

Father is blessing
The night of all nights;
All who are hungry
To feast he invites.

"All who are homeless
Yet masters shall be,
Slaves who are this year—
The next shall be free!"

Children ask "questions,"
And father replies;
Playfully sparkle
The wine and the eyes.

Hymns of redemption
All merrily sing,
Queen is each mother,
Each father, a king.

IV

Midnight. The Seder
Is come to an end;
Guardian angels
From heaven descend.

Each one a message
Of liberty brings,
Scattering blessings
Of peace from his wings.

V

Asleep is the townlet,
The field, and the lake;
Only the full moon
Above is awake,

Shedding its tender,
Its silvery light,
Guarding God's chosen,
God's people to-night.

The Feast of Weeks

WE have an ancient custom
Surviving from the East,
To decorate our dwellings
With flowers for the feast.

How quaint is this old custom
From East to exile brought!
But why does it awaken
In me such gloomy thought?

I see the flower-bearers
'Mid ghetto's rush and strife,
And in my mind is woven
A dream of vanished life.

A land with fair green pastures
Is in my vision born,
And palm and cedar forests,
And fields of golden corn,

And mountains trimmed with olives,
  And vales with lilies decked,
And peasants strong and happy,
  With heart and head erect.

Each garden and each vineyard
  In tones of plenty speaks,
Rich nature celebrating
  Its glorious Feast of Weeks.

The men like stately cedars,
  The women tall as palms,
Their festal hymns are chanting,
  Their wondrous sacred psalms.

And children, gay and merry,
  Arrive in fair array,
Luxuriant laurels bearing
  In honor of the day.

. . . . . .

The phantom views are vanished;
Around, alas, I see
A sordid, gloomy ghetto—
No sign of field or tree.

I see through busy alleys
A Jew his flowers bring,
To decorate his dwelling
In memory of spring.

Oh, long has he forgotten
His fair, his native home;
In exile he has learnèd
From town to town to roam.

No longer a Judean—
A weary, exiled Jew;
In ghetto he is praying
For harvest, rain, and dew.

I see him bent and weary—
O God, how sad it is!—
How long will he pluck flowers
From fields that are not his?

And prayingly I murmur:
"O Israel's Rock and Shield,
Bring back Thy ancient people
To garden, wood, and field.

Let them revive the custom,
Fair custom of the East,
With flowers from *their* gardens
To celebrate their feast."

Hanukkah Lights

I KINDLED my eight little candles,
My Hanukkah candles, and lo!
Fair visions and dreams half-forgotten
Were rising of years long ago.

I musingly gazed at my candles,
Meseemed in their quivering flames
In golden, in fiery letters
I read the old, glorious names;

The names of our heroes immortal,
The noble, the brave, and the true;
A battlefield saw I in vision,
Where many were conquered by few;

And mute lay the Syrian army,
Judea's proud foe, in the field;
And Judas, the brave Maccabaeus,
I saw in his helmet and shield.

His eyes shone like bright stars of heaven,
Like music resounded his voice:
"Brave comrades, we fought and we conquered,
Now let us in God's name rejoice!

We conquered; but know, my brave comrades,
No triumph is due to the sword;
Remember our motto and watchword,
'For the people and towns of the Lord.'"

He spoke, and from all the four corners
An echo repeated each word;
The woods and the mountains re-echoed:
"For the people and towns of the Lord."

And swiftly the message spread, calling:
"Judea, Judea is free!
Rekindled the lamp in the Temple,
Rekindled each bosom with glee!"

. . . . . .

My Hanukkah candles soon flickered,
Around me was darkness of night;
But deep in my soul I felt shining
A heavenly, wonderful light.

The Miracle

THE Rabbi tells his old, old tale,
The pupils seated round.
". . . And thus, my boys, no holy oil
In the Temple could be found.

The heathens left no oil to light
The Lord's eternal lamp;
At last one jar, one single jar,
Was found with the high priest's stamp.

Its oil could only last one day—
But God hath wondrous ways;
For lo! a miracle occurred:
It burned for eight whole days."

The tale was ended, but the boys,
All open-eyed and dumb,
Sat listening still, as though aware
Of stranger things to come.

Just wait, my boys, permit me, pray,
The liberty to take;
Your Rabbi—may he pardon me—
Has made a slight mistake.

Not eight days, but two thousand years
That jar of oil did last,
To quell its wondrous flames availed
No storm, no flood, no blast.

But this is not yet all, my boys:
The miracle just starts.
This flame is kindling light and hope
In countless gloomy hearts.

And in our long and starless night,
Lest we should go astray,
It beacon-like sheds floods of light,
And eastwards points the way,

Where light will shine on Zion's hill,
As in the days of old.
The miracle is greater, boys,
Than what your Rabbi told.

A Prayer

GOD, I pray Thee, grant Thy people
Just their daily bread;—
Not the bread of strife and friction,
Not the bread of sad affliction,
Tearless daily bread;
Not the bread by slaves desired,
Not the bread by shame acquired—
Honest daily bread;
That they may no longer gather
Crumbs from wealthy tables, Father,
Give their daily bread!

God, I pray Thee, grant Thy people
Courage, heart, and strength;—
Not the strength, like tempest rushing,
On its way all wrecking, crushing—
Noble heart and strength;

That in man's inhuman battle,
They may not, like driven cattle,
Slaughtered be at length;
That they may be self-depending,
That they may be self-defending,
God, O give them strength!

God, I pray Thee, grant Thy people
Just a little pride;—
Not the pride that severs brothers,
Seeing only faults in others—
True and noble pride;
That their young, and brave, and healthy,
That their wise, and strong, and wealthy,
Drift not with the tide;
That whate'er in life their stations,
Theirs be noble aspirations,
God, O give them pride!

God, I pray Thee, grant Thy people
Shelter and a home;—
Not a home that swords acquire,
Not a home of blood and fire—
Just a peaceful home;
That they may not ever wander,
Torn and rent in parts asunder,
Tramp the earth and roam;
That their bond be never shattered,
That they be no longer scattered,
God, O bring them home!

My Faith

I BELIEVE, O my friend,
That the day will arrive
When all nations for peace
And for justice will strive;

When in kindness and truth
Soul will answer to soul,
And when love in her grace
Will the peoples control;

When man, humbled, enslaved,
Will raise proudly his head,
When no groans will be heaved,
And no tears will be shed.

O my friend, I believe
In life's heavenly goal,
In the height of man's mind,
In the depth of man's soul;

In the triumph of truth,
In all mankind's rebirth,
In the kingdom of light,
In the glory on earth.

That bright beacon, dear friend,
Through our fog gleams to me;
But between, O, between,
What a stormy, wild sea!

And the sea is so deep
With its tears, with its glooms;
And the shore, that bright shore,
So remotely it looms.

And the gale is so fierce,
And so dark is the night;
And the fog is so dense,
And so faint is the light;

That I know, O dear friend,
Not for you nor for me
'Tis that shore to attain
Through this turbulent sea.

A New Song

BY the Babylonian billows
Sat and wept the exiled Jew;
Judah's harp hung mute on willows—
Now I wish to sing anew.

Hush, old lamentation reader,
Cease to weep, and whine, and carp!
Left old Lebanon no cedar
For a new-strung Judah's harp?

Has the exile, vile and odious,
Rooted out king David's art?
Is there left no soul melodious
To awake the exile's heart?

Nay, a new sun rises o'er us,
Judah's harp hung mute too long;
Come with me and join the chorus
Of a new-sung Zion's song!

My Tenant

IN my youth hope hired
In my heart a tent;
Promised me a fortune,
Never paid her rent.

Bankrupt is my tenant—
This I know at length—
Why then to expel her
Do I lack the strength?

Dreams of Youth

O NO, they will not die,
My golden dreams of youth,
When faith, and bliss, and love
No phantoms were, but truth.

When earth appeared to me
A sky-reflecting brook;
When my pure childish heart
Was but a sacred book;

A book where noble deeds
Wrote here and there a line,
And oft engraved their names
In characters divine.

O childhood's book sublime,
In thee I find a page
That time will not efface,
That will not fade with age.

The time when earth below
  Seemed fair as heav'n above,
When all the world around
  Foretold but life and love.

O no, it cannot die,
  My wondrous dream of youth,
The time before I knew
  How sad is earthly truth;

Before I saw the world
  When stripped of veil and mask,
Before I knew how sad,
  How vain the dreamer's task.

And though I trod life's path
  Of grooves, and ruts, and mire,
Youth's shrine, though long destroyed,
  Yet sheds a sacred fire.

Thus trembles still a tune,
Although the cord is rent;
Thus, though the rose be dead,
Still fragrant is its scent.

Prometheus

BEFORE his statue long I stood;
It seemed to me I understood
His heart's desire:
To carry heaven's light to men,
Though he must suffer torture then
For stealing fire.

But one sad thought perplexed my soul:
My ancient people never stole
God's treasured light;
To them His flame Himself He gave,
When life was dim, when man was slave
And wrapped in night.

Prometheus, though thy woe be great,
Yet sadder is my people's fate,
  Their grief and pain;
To men they brought God's treasured flame,
And suffered torture, wrong, and shame
  In vain, in vain!

Before his statue when I stood,
And saw the vulture drink his blood,
  I sadly thought:
My people, too, through endless years
Shed streams of blood and floods of tears
  For light they brought.

The Linnet

HAVE you heard the linnet trilling,
To discover did you try
What is hidden in her carol—
Does she sing or does she cry?

I am singing like the linnet,
When my heart does pine and long;
Love, and pain, and joy, and sorrow,
All are hidden in my song.

To My Nearest Friend

Forgive!

WE side by side lived many years,
And from the hour we first did meet
We fairly shared life's smiles and tears,
We shared life's bitter herbs and sweet.

And oft you brightened like a star
The dark horizon of my heart;
And still we oft were near and far,
Both knit in one, and yet apart.

Your soul is simple, kind, and true,
But mine, forgive, you oft mistook;
The dreamer's soul remained to you
With seven seals a sealèd book.

Forgive!

I know not what it might have been,
If you had read that book aright;
Perchance we both would then have seen
Life's goal in quite a different light.

Life

WHEN thy sky sheds golden light
On thy earth all bloom-bedight,
Full of fragrance and delight,
And thy heart believes in right,
Virtue, manliness, and truth—
Thine is happy youth.

When from nature's hidden stream
Flows into thy heart a dream
That makes life a poet's theme,
And the earth an Eden seem,
Fair and pure as heav'n above—
Friend, thou art in love!

When thy earth seems one vast plain,
Whereon men, with might and main,
Struggle something to attain:
Rise, and fall, and rise again,
Wounding, wounded in the strife—
Thou but seest life.

When thy earth looks grey and old,
Like an autumn barren wold,
And thy heart, so lone and cold,
Feels as though its tale is told—
Youth, and love, and life, dear friend,
All proclaim the end.

A Procession

COLD was that night, I remember,
Late in the month of December,
Freezing, and snowing, and hailing,
Sadly the north-wind was wailing,
Wailing, like one who beseeches
Shelter from demons and witches
That in the Tsar's dismal regions
Crowd the dark forests in legions.

And in that night of December
I a procession remember—
Not a procession of freemen—
Men-folk, and children, and women,
Driven along without pity
Out of the Tsar's holy city.

Faces so pallid and fearful,
Eyes looking frightened and tearful,

Shivering bodies scant-covered—
Death shadows over them hovered—
Passing in dismal procession.
What was their crime, their transgression?
Ah, in those holy dominions
Heresies were their opinions.

Hailing it was then and snowing,
Fiercely the north-wind was blowing,
Piping so mournful a ditty,
Pouring out sighs on the city.

Sadly I watched as they wandered.
Where are they led to—I pondered—
Which friendly haven will greet them,
Which friendly countenance meet them,
Where are on earth their defenders,
Theirs, the eternal offenders?

Plodding they clung to each other,
Parents, and sister, and brother,

Slowly and heavily pacing,
Mothers their infants embracing,
And with their mouth breath them warming.
Wildly the north-wind was storming,
And as they walked in depression,
Meseemed 'twas a ghostly procession.

. . . . . .

Sadly that night of December
I shall forever remember!

Undaunted

THE flowers bud, the flowers fade,
The sun-lit day grows cold;
The streamlets flow, the streamlets freeze,
The year is growing old.

The cradle and the tomb are twins,
Go arm in arm on earth;
And love is pain, and joy is grief,
And sadness lurks in mirth.

Hear life's echo calling, warning
Man, and grove and field:
"Tender flower, soon thou fadest;
Oak, thy fate is sealed.

Maiden, short-lived is thy beauty;
Child, thou growest old;
Sunny summer, swift thy parting—
Winter marches cold.

Youth departs, and beauty withers,
  Life on earth is doomed."
I alone shall never wither—
  I have never bloomed.

Winter has for me no horror—
  Spring I have not seen;
Age? I fear not its arrival—
  Young I have not been.

Life can ne'er claim back the treasures
  It refused to give:
I shall never fade nor perish—
  I did never live.

To a Critic

WHAT! I do not sing—I cry!
And you wonder why?

Have you ever tried, my friend,
E'er to suffer to no end,
Life to be an empty name,
With no goal in it, no aim,
Oft to read on every face
Open joy at your disgrace:
Your fate decided,
Your dreams derided,
Your talents unheeded,
Your virtues unneeded,
Your presence a danger—
To all men a stranger;
With heavens grey and dull as lead
Hanging o'er thy head?

Or, did you in a desert stray,
Seeing no escape, no way,
Carried by some fatal blast
To no future from no past;
Void of dreams, and void of hope,
Slide some fatal slope
  Of an abyss
  You cannot miss;
And yet,
Love, and pine, and feel regret?

You, who have a home, a friend,
This will never comprehend,
And you must not ask me why
I, an exile singer, cry!

Two Birds

THE mother bird sat with her babe on a twig;
The little one tremblingly lisped to the big:

"O mother, I shudder, O mother, I fear
A man with a gun I saw passing us near.

O mother, I saw he was lifting his head,
O mother, I fear he will shoot us both dead."

The mother bird soothèd her baby's alarm:
"O worry not, darling, he'll do us no harm;

Thou hearest the thunders on sea and on shore—
All these are the signals of mankind at war.

O worry not, darling, his gun do not mind:
The man is too busy with killing his kind."

To-morrow

MY day is a father, a mother my night,
Their child is, dear friend, my to-morrow;
How can I expect that their child will be bright—
An offspring of gloom and of sorrow?

Autumn

ALL the songs are sung,
All the birds are fled;
Hill and dale proclaim:
"Summer fair is dead."

Sullen, cloud-veiled skies
Look on earth and weep;
Meadow, wood, and field
Robe in mourning deep;

And the angry wind,
With its icy breath,
Carries round the tale
Of the summer's death.

Autumn in the skies,
Autumn in the air;
Autumn fills the soul,
Autumn everywhere.

Doleful days like these
I prefer to spend
With my speechless grief—
With my bosom-friend.

Long-gone days revive,
Crowd in gloomy hosts;
Childhood, youth emerge
From their graves like ghosts;

Childhood that had gone,
Void of joy and light;
Youth that fled away,
Cold and dark as night.

And a voice half-choked
Whispers in my ear:
"Exile child, thy life
Passed like autumn drear;

Starless were thy nights,
Sunless were thy days;
Ne'er to thee have smiled
Heaven's cheerful rays.

Sorrow gave thee birth,
Exile was thy nurse;
Cruel fate has sealed
On thy brow a curse,

Like the autumn wind
Aimlessly to roam,
Wander round the earth,
Nowhere find a home;

Bear a pining soul,
Look with tearful eyes
On the world and men—
Like the autumn skies;

Like an autumn field,
  Void of heaven's beams,
Bear an empty heart,
  Void of hope and dreams;

And from birth to grave
  Trudge a thorny way,
Like a funeral train
  In an autumn day."

My Star

WHEN the stars by night sing vespers,
And devoutly shine,
From above a still voice whispers:
"One of them is thine."

As I lift my eyes in wonder,
I behold my star:
Lone and pale it travels yonder,
Cold, and dim, and far.

Alone in the Desert

MY guiding light is dying,
The night is cold and dark:
I can't find in the desert
My way without a spark.

My guiding light is dying,
In vain I strain my sight,
For boundless is the desert,
Engulfed in starless night.

My guiding light is dying—
No gleam, no moon, no star;
My way is wrapped in darkness,
The day, alas, is far!

To Life

COME with me to justice, life,
If thou fear not truth:
Thou has robbed me of my dreams,
Treasures of my youth.

For thy blissful moments few
Thou hast charged me years,
And for every treacherous smile—
Disillusion, tears.

Pure and faithful was my heart
When I was a child;
Why hast thou my trust, my faith,
And my love defiled?

Come with me to justice, life,
If thou fear not truth:
Give my dreams and visions back,
Treasures of my youth.

If thou canst not give them back,
Why prolong the strife?
Void of youth and void of dreams,
Who can prize thee, life?

My Epitaph

WHEN I am dead,
Write o'er my head,
On marble, stone, or slate:
Here lies a man
Who life did scan
With aims and claims too great;
Who free and proud
Among the crowd
Was placed by cruel fate;
Who 'midst the throng
In vain did long
And search for friend or mate;
Whom, from above
Being sent to love,
Life could not teach to hate.

The Fountain of Love

CHILD, each man has a heart,
And each heart has a dream;
Yet of one they are part,
Though so many they seem.

Like the myriads of beams
From the great sun above,
To men's hearts flow all dreams
From one fountain of love.

And Shouldst Thou Wish to Know

(After the Hebrew of Bialik)

AND shouldst thou wish to know the source
From which thy tortured brethren drew
In evil days their strength of soul
To meet their doom, stretch out their necks
To each uplifted knife and axe,
In flames, on stakes to die with joy,
And with a whisper "God is one"
To close their lips?

And shouldst thou wish to find the spring
From which thy banished brethren drew,
'Midst fear of death and fear of life,
Their comfort, courage, patience, trust,
And iron will to bear their yoke,
To live bespattered and despised,
And suffer to no end?

And shouldst thou wish to see the lap
Whereon thy people's galling tears
In ceaseless torrents fell and fell,
And hear the cries that moved the hills,
And thrilled Satan with awe and grief,
But not the stony heart of man,
Than Satan's and than rock's more hard?

And shouldst thou wish to see the fort
Wherein thy fathers refuge sought,
And all their sacred treasures hid,
The refuge that has still preserved
Thy nation's soul intact and pure,
And when despised, and scorned, and scoffed,
Their faith they did not shame?

And shouldst thou wish to see and know
Their mother, faithful, loving, kind,
Who gathered all the burning tears
Of her bespattered, hapless sons,
And when to her in grief they came,

She tenderly wiped off their tears,
And sheltered them, and shielded them,
And lulled them on her lap to sleep?

If thou, my brother, knowest not
This mother, spring, and lap, and fort,
Then enter thou the House of God,
The House of Study, old and grey,
Throughout the sultry summer days,
Throughout the gloomy winter nights,
At morning, midday, or at eve;
Perchance there is a remnant yet,
Perchance thy eye may still behold
In some dark corner, hid from view,
A cast-off shadow of the past,
The profile of some pallid face,
Upon an ancient folio bent,
Who seeks to drown unspoken woes
In the talmudic boundless waves;
And then thy heart shall guess the truth

That thou hast touched the sacred ground
Of thy great nation's House of Life,
And that thy eyes do gaze upon
The treasure of thy nation's soul.

And know that this is but a spark
That by a miracle escaped
Of that bright light, that sacred flame,
Thy forebears kindled long ago
On altars high and pure.

An Evening Prayer

WHEN the dying sun's traces of blood
Are yet staining the heaven's blue field,
When black shadows invade hill and wood,
And the doom of the day has been sealed;

When the mist robs the trees of their gold,
Of their crystal each streamlet and spring,
When the flowers do shiver with cold
At the flutter of night's chilly wing;

Then my prayer to heaven I send:
"God of mercy, the source of all light,
Be a shield, and a guide, and a friend
To all strayed who are guideless by night!"

The Jewish Soldier

(An episode of the Russo-Japanese war)

HE was both young and brave,
Of iron heart and hand;
He loved his wife, his child,
He loved his native land.

But when the bugle called
His country to defend,
Nor home could keep him back,
Nor wife, nor child, nor friend.

"Good-bye, dear wife," he said,
"And if in field I fall,
Be sure a soldier died,
Obeying duty's call."

And bravely fighting for
His homeland and his Tsar,
Of wife and child he dreamt,—
They were his guiding star.

A wonder to his mates,
A horror to his foe,
No danger, hunger, thirst
He seemed to care or know.

His fighting mates came home,
The battle long was o'er;
He, too, came home, alas,
To find his home no more.

His wife and child were slain,
While he from them was far,
By holy Russia's sons,
The favoured of his Tsar.

A shapeless heap he found,
Where erst his cottage stood;
And in that heap he saw
The traces of their blood.

A heap of blood and dust,
No living soul was there;
The dauntless heart in war
Was conquered by despair.

The heart in field unhurt
Was pierced by fate's sore dart.

. . . . . .

The stream, the cold, black stream,
Did heal his wounded heart.

Two Thrones

(Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Theodor Herzl)

"IS it true, O tell me, mother,
What I was in Cheder told?
That there are two thrones in heaven,
One of tears and one of gold.

That the throne of gold by Gentiles
Was presented for God's use,
And the throne of tears—unused yet—
Was the humble gift of Jews.

But one day when great Jehovah
Will ascend our throne with might,
All our tears will turn to diamonds,
And will shed a wondrous light.

Then Messiah, long expected,
Will forsake the gates of Rome,
And will lead the exiled people
Back to their ancestral home.

But, alas, our throne is faulty,
For it lacks a single screw,—
Dearest mother, what a pity!
Is it, prithee, really true?"

"True, my child," the mother answered,
"What you were in Cheder told;
But that screw, it must be, darling,
Not of tears, and not of gold.

Nay, it must be forged of courage
In a brave, true Jewish heart;
But, alas, my child, we cannot
Find a place that work to start.

Thus our throne remains unfinished,
And throughout the endless years,
We are vainly weeping, weeping,
Merely adding useless tears."

For a while the boy stood musing,
Murm'ring softly: "Is it true?"
Then exclaimed with childish fervor:
"Mother, I shall forge the screw."

Spring and Autumn

Spring.

THE earth and the heaven both rival
To celebrate nature's revival;
Beholding prince spring on arrival,
The mountains and forests salute.
On carpets of silk softly treading,
Sweet nectar from flower-cups shedding,
A guest at the world's golden wedding,
He plays on a gold-spangled lute.
The heaven sends sun rays to treat him,
The streamlets speed gaily to meet him,
The birds with their chorus to greet him—
My heart, why alone is it mute?

Autumn.

Dark shadows and clouds are parading,
The gloomy earth gloomier shading,

The pale, frightened flowers are fading,
The birds their sad exodus start.
The cornfield, laid waste by the reaper,
In mourning robes deeper and deeper,
The heaven, dead summer's beweeper,
Sheds tears for the joys that depart.
The dull days, each other resembling,
The shadows, like night ghosts assembling,
Each leaf and each heart set a-trembling—
Who wakes then a song in my heart?

My Kate

O YOU, of the set whom the vulgar call
"smart,"
O you, who unblushingly state
That wedlock and love are two things quite apart
And rarely united by fate,
Come visit my cottage, before you depart
To sell or to purchase a mate,
And see what in life is a woman's true part,
How love renders noble and great;
And see that the queen of my house and my heart,
My wife and my love, is my Kate.

Two Magicians

THE coal on the stone hearth is glowing ablaze;
I sit on my grandmother's knee, and I gaze
At fiery serpents that rise and that fall,
And caper with shadows that skip on the wall,
Enshrouding the room with a fairy-knit veil,
While grandmother tells me her charming old tale.

There lived a godly man,
Who ancient books did scan
To learn the ways of God
And paths the righteous trod.
He had a godly heart
That for all wronged did smart,
And prayed to God that he
The earth from ill might free.

And heaven kind at length
Endowed with magic strength
The sage who prayed and longed
To help and right the wronged.

And God did him reveal
A talisman, to heal,
To solace, help, and cheer
All mankind, far and near,
And wonders to perform:
To chain the waves and storm,
And, like a bird on high,
To rise and soar in sky,
That neither time, nor space
Should stay his work of grace.

Thus many, many years
He wiped off human tears;
Wherever he appeared
The wronged were helped and cheered.

My grandmother dear (be her memory blessed)
Repaired long ago to her heavenly rest.
I grew, and life tells me a story as strange,
Albeit the magician with ages did change.
For now our magician makes nature his slave:
He fetters the tempest and bridles the wave.
His voice all over the world can be heard,
He fathoms the ocean, he soars like a bird,
He measures the earth in its breadth, in its length;
'Stead virtue and mercy his motto is strength,
And oft his great magic he does but employ
To plunder and ruin, to kill and destroy.
O how our magician is great in his art!
One thing he is lacking—a heart, but a heart.

To My Love

(A Serenade)

WERE the stars but aware
That to them I compare,
Love, thy eyes,
Full of glee they would shine
With a light more divine
In the skies.

Were the roses aware
That their breath I compare,
Love, to thine,
Vale and meadow and hill
They with fragrance would fill,
Like sweet wine.

Were the skylark aware
That thy voice I compare
To its trill,
With its magic sweet song
Wood and dale all day long
It would fill.

Were my heart but aware
That a song or a prayer
Hearts could move,
Like a lark in the spring
I would pray, and would sing
Hymns of love.

The Lime-Tree

CHILD, thou radiant skies adorest,
And thou askest why
I prefer the shady forest
To the sun-lit sky!

By the house, where I was born,
Once a lime-tree stood;
A survivor, lost and lorn,
Of a man-wrecked wood.

All too soon my childhood ended,
Lone I likewise grew;
And we both became befriended—
Lonely orphans two.

And our sorrows to each other
We confided then;
I, a child without a mother,
He, a tree 'mong men.

Oft, when woe my soul invaded,
'Neath his heart-shaped leaf,
Solaced, comforted, and shaded,
I forgot my grief.

And at length, when we were parted,
Driven by my fate,
None did sigh so faithful-hearted
As my lime-tree mate.

Child, thou radiant skies adorest,
Canst thou now guess why
I love more the shady forest
Than the glowing sky?

My Fate

ONE night, when dejected
I sat in my room,
She came unexpected
Through shadows and gloom.

She fairy-like glided,
Approached me, and smiled;
"Thy fate is decided,"
She murmured, "dear child.

(For, lo, my decisions
Have heaven's assent)
Thy life just in visions
Henceforth shall be spent.

The years shall be streaming,
But thee they shall miss,
For thou shalt be dreaming
Of youth and of bliss.

Though autumn and showers
The earth shall invade,
Thy heart-watered flowers
Shall bloom undecayed;

And though thou art driven,
And sufferest wrong,
Thy earth shall be heaven,
Thy sigh just a song."

She having thus spoken
Her blessing or curse,
The darkness was broken,
The clouds did disperse;

The moon came out shining
In silver above;—
Since then I am pining
For youth and for love.

SONGS of a WANDERER

RASKIN